

The Inflatable Angel

THE NIGHT SÉANCE

There are fewer people believing in ghost evocation, even when they busy themselves with spirit rapping. The Goroziyas did not believe that they would get in touch with the soul of Giorgi Gurjiev. Souls are like Hollywood stars. It's abso-lutely impossible to make contact with them.

Nino and Niko Gorozia had no expectation of success right up to the end. And still they had blacked out the kitchen. There was a large square of Whatman paper lying on the table. Someone had drawn a wide circle and studiously written Georgian letters with felt pen. "YES" and "NO" were the words written beneath the circle. There was a saucer lying upside down with an arrow painted with felt pen, too. A short and bold candle was burning on the saucer studded with scarlet dots. The coral red light passed only to the Whatman paper, the saucer with the painted arrow, their hands resting on the table and the faces of the Goroziyas.

Neither the clock telling that the first hour had already begun, nor the kitchen sink full of dirty dishes could be seen in the darkness. The candle-light did not reach the corner. There was a carcass of a dead fly floating in the café con leche left in a mug with the Nesquik rabbit portrayed on it. The room was stuffy – it was a mixture of nicotine, dishwashing detergent and a dog's stench smell to-gether. Fuko, a pink-muzzled bull terrier napped in a chair standing at the wall. The neighbor's TV could be heard in the kitchen. Someone was watching "Profile" with Maia Asatiani hosting another joker. The laughing audience applauded with zeal.

Nino always looked younger than she really was. Yes, she was a small fry at Tbilisi City Hall, but even there one can find women looking young for their age. The slightly withered bosom along with the large blue eyes, the nice figure and the absence of cellulite proved her youthful looks. Who would have thought that an iron will was lying hidden behind her continent appearance and melancholic eyes. Niko was not a giant himself. Nevertheless, in contrast to Nino, there was something unbearable and politically incorrect in his size. The chubby cheeks, round lips and the passionless eyes made him look like a depressed psychopath.

But his nature was so gentle that one could knead him like dough.

Nino had thrust her feet into rubber flippers. She was dressed in jeans shorts and a white, almost transparent shirt. She had just come out of the bathroom and had not dried the short, tousled hair thoroughly. The shampoo scent was slightly brightening up the stuffy air in the

room. She was not wearing a bra and the tight nipples were bulging the shirt. Slightly aroused, she just wanted Niko to sneak his hand under the shirt and touch her tit...

But Niko was looking down at the saucer with the arrow, thinking about the éclair in the refrigerator that he could not touch. He had been refraining from eat-ing after 6 p.m. for a week. It was racking. The diet was a fixed idea rather than a necessity, for he really had no problem with overweight.

The idea to arrange the séance popped into her head that day, while she was poking around the internet. Niko had nothing against the idea. It is not easy for one to disagree with his wife, especially if she's eager to get in contact with the deceased. He just asked:

"Why Gurjiev?" Then he added to himself: "No, say... say..." He wanted to raise a more authoritative dead man, though he failed to remember anyone but the par-rot that he had when he was a boy. One morning, when he took the cloth off the cage, there was a dead bird lying on the bottom. It was still warm. When he took the tiny body, the bird's head dropped to the side...

"Because", Nino paused, "Because, we'll talk to him in Georgian at least".

The whole point is that the Goroziyas did not know any foreign language pretty well. If she found herself cornered, Nino would manage to say something in Ger-man. Niko was even worse in English. But why on earth had they to make such an effort? Nino was less informed about Gurjiev. She knew that he was not Georgian, though she thought he was born in Georgia.

Niko had some doubts about any language barrier with souls, but in his heart of hearts he still agreed with his wife. There was something motherly in their marital relations.

Some time he had been considered to be a promising director. He was twenty, when all of a sudden the attention was focused on him due to his student shorts. Many spoke about his intuition and quick eye. It seemed that everything was ahead of him: momentary love affairs with desperate housewives, a scarf around his neck and a half-wild way of life... before he met Nino, his future wife.

With Nino he suddenly faded and got tender... A still camera replaced his video camera all by itself. During the last three years he even participated in sev-eral collective photography exhibitions, though as it turned out, the penetrating eye had already become dull. There were people able to take pictures of black and white portraits and landscapes and they did it much better than he used to do. He saw that, but he felt it without a twitch. That's why his still camera was more and more often left on the shelf by the side of his CDs

and books. As for his intuition, now he could just divine what would upset Nino, especially as he had been kept by her for quite long. Sometimes, when they were together, Niko used to say the things he thought he was expected to say for the moment.

“Who knows!” thought Niko that night. He tried to shake the dead parrot out of his head and said:

“Let it be Gurjiev,” shrugged his shoulders and added for some reason: “We’ll see.”

THE DANCING MASTER

Nino did not expect any great success in store for them, even when she passed the inverted plate over the candle flame and put it down on the cardboard. The Ey-jafiallajokull Volcano in Iceland was just going to erupt when in Tbilisi the Goro-zias gently touched the saucer with their fingers and closed their eyes. “Gurjiev, come to us!.. Gurjiev, come !..” Nino whispered more mechanically than fervently.

The plate wavered first. Then it got stuck against the cardboard. When they heard some crackling noise from the hallway, Nino fell silent at once. The Goro-zias goggled at each other. Fuko jumped up and prinked up his ears. There was a rustling in the hallway again. Fuko leapt off the chair. The dog, all focused on the rustle, moved towards the hall, growling. The pace of his short, brawny legs re-minded one of a big lizard moving its extremities sideways. Nino squeezed Niko’s hand. Fuko stepped into the hallway.

Someone hacked there distinctly. All of a sudden Fuko stopped growling. Sounds of fuss could be heard from the darkness. Nino squeezed Niko’s hand more strongly.

The latter failed to think of anything else and whispered to the dog in the darkness: “Fuko!”

Then he called a bit louder: “Fuko!”

“It’s here,” was the answer from the hall.

Nino’s eyes bugged out and the hair on her back stood on end. She was a Geor-gian woman and obviously had some hair along her spinal column.

“Who’s there?” asked Niko. He was whispering for some reason.

An awkward old man of medium height appeared from the darkness. There was something about him that could remind one of a seal. Even in the light of the candle it could be seen well that the man was a bit sightless. He had large high- beams and a gerontic fold of fat under his chin. His white and thick mous-tache with the ends turned up seemed to be

growing right from the nostrils. He had unbuttoned his black, shrunk jacket. A chain of his gold watch was hanging between the pocket of the black satin vest and a button. He wore a pair of flat and dusty lace-up shoes. He had put on a black, Karakul papaka of a strange shape, a mixture of a Sufi taji hat and a pioneer headgear. Fuko was by his side, shaking its tail.

“It’s me,” said the man from afar. “Gurjiev.”

At the end he slewed his tongue so as Nino failed to make it out what he said, Gurjiev or Dorziev. Niko stood up at the sight of the old man.

“Please come in,” said Niko, “Mister...”

“Call me Guru,” the old man helped him. Gurjiev’s style of speech was a little strange, as if he was hardly suppressing a smile.

“Guru,” repeated Niko.

“Well,” the old man held out his hand to Niko, “I like the name Rymond, too.” Fuko barked inaudibly. It was like coughing, asking for their attention. “Rymond,” asked Niko and dolefully shook hands with the guest.

Fuko stood up on the hind legs, resting against the old man with his paws. The man, who nearly fell, patted Fuko’s head and rubbed the dog’s ear.

“Let it be Guru,” said the man with a smile, “but without that Mister!” Niko could not make it out whether the guest was joking or not.

“Salaam-alaikum!” The old man shook hands with Nino. “A dancing master, Giorgi Gurjiev. For you just Guru.”

Gurjiev looked into Nino’s eyes for a second. She instantly felt a slight tingling between her legs and a shiver went up her body. It was somewhat of a hypnotism, pleasing and terrifying at a time. “Nino.” Notwithstanding her being embarrassed, she felt that the guest’s palm was warm and pudgy.

Before the old man took his hand away, Nino noticed that he had a silver ring on his middle finger. There were some birds imprinted on the jeweler’s work. Each detail could be singled out even in the wan light of the candle like the details of an obverse of a newly cast coin. There were a little man with a bird head, a double-headed eagle, a stork standing on one of its legs and an ordinary rooster imprinted on the silver circle one after another...Only one bird imprint was repeated three times - three birds like three dots next to each other. The bird had a large body, a small head and a sickle bill.

The guest caught the direction of Nino's gaze.

"It's an Andean condor," said the guest and nodded to Nino hurriedly. "This is an honor!"

Niko noticed that the guest grinned at the sight of the saucer with the arrow painted on it. He also noticed that the old man spoke Georgian with a nice accent. He talked in a quiet manner. Niko realized that Nino was right about raising Gurjiev's soul.

"Would you like some tea?" Nino stood up from the chair. "We have some *éclairs*," thought Niko.

"There's no time," the guest took the watch out of the pocket and looked down at it, "I'm so sorry. I have to be somewhere else right now... I don't know how I happened to be here". The guest turned his lower lip out. "Something has been mixed up, I guess."

There was an awkward silence in the kitchen. Niko turned away from the old man. He looked at Nino first, then at Fuko and the refrigerator. Finally he stared at Nino again.

"I'll disappear now," said the guest in a businesslike manner. He began to count: "Five...four..." the Goroziyas fixed their eyes on the old man. "Three...two...one." True, Gurjiev was spectacular in his counting and even flinched like a TV picture with a glare, but he did not disappear. Something just crackled in his paunch

and threw black soot out of his ears along with a burnt rubber smell.

Fuko was astonished. The dog barked indistinctly. It was like a cough. The guest looked at the watch, shook it in the air, put against his ear and looked at it again.

"What's up?" asked Nino. "Don't know," the guest belched involuntarily and disgorged the rest of the soot from his mouth like a smoke. The burnt rubber could be smelled again.

An awkward hush fell over the kitchen again. The guest seemed to be perplexed.

"Can I help you?" Niko moved a chair to the man, "Please sit down". "I don't, dear, I don't think..." The old man sat down automatically.

"The main thing is not to panic." The guest seemed to have been talking with himself more than with the Goroziyas. "Let's talk and ... we'll see when I disappear."

KEEN ON MUSHROOMS

A cone made Gurjiev trip in the forest of Mtatsminda. He failed to control himself and made several somersaults on the ground like a circus bear... He happened to hit his head against a mossy stone with such a force that everything went dark before his eyes instantly and his ears stuffed up. He almost swooned. Gurjiev did not feel that some splinters of glass had cut his knee. He sat on the splashy ground covered with leaves and conifer needles. He was stunned. There were an egg shell and a wine bottle smashed into smithereens nearby. A crumpled, shabby etiquette of "Kindzmarauli" was still sticking at the shards.

Gurjiev could not notice that in front of him under a fir tree a mushroom with a red cap had thrust out of the leaves. If he had seen the mushroom, he would necessarily have recognized young Griboedov with the round glasses on his nose, a rainbow in his eyes and a red polka-dot hat with those white dots on it. The story goes that the soul of Aleksandr Griboedov still roams about Mtatsminda forest, often getting into mushrooms. It's easy to understand. The diplomat killed in Teheran in 1829 was interred just in the vicinity, in Mtatsminda Pantheon. The me-tempsychosis of Griboedov's soul getting into mushrooms is a usual thing. Where on earth can one who's keen on mushroom live other than in a mushroom? And the rainbow was in his eyes just because there are some beings living like parasites obtaining nourishment from others in which they live. Like Gurjiev, Griboedov had quite enigmatic eyes, too. When one has spent a century in a mushroom eating the same mushroom his gaze will turn into something enigmatic, no matter whether he likes it or not.

Griboedov could not see Gurjiev, either. It's too difficult to see something before you when there's a rainbow jammed into your eyes, especially when the rainbow revolves like a hypnotic spiral. Standing under a fir and smiling cunningly, he was smoking his small hook. Griboedov breathed a sweetish, violet smoke out of his lips towards Gurjiev, making the latter more and more stupefied. The two, Griboedov and Gurjiev, had something in common besides their enigmatic looks. It was neither the fact that they both were buried far away from their fatherlands, nor the stereotypes resulting from the world wide net that made everyone and everything just equal. The great warriors resembled each other in something different.

Besides the smoke, the air was full of the heady reek of dampness, onions and humus. Gurjiev discovered that the scratch was bleeding when Fuko started to lick his knee. He laughed – he was a boy when he got his knee slightly scratched, and a dog had licked the blood coming out of the wound then.

Filo was the name of the Caucasian shepherd. When he got three years old, his dad brought him a black and pudgy ball with a small, wet muzzle and paws that were still rose-colored. It had a milky breath.

Gurjiev looked at Fuko, realizing that he knew almost nothing about the dog reminding him of a big, white rat. He knew nothing about the owners of the dog and about the city the fragments of which could be seen between the trees - Mtats-minda and a part of the Sololaki districts.

A giant, zinc woman in the ruins of Narikala Fortress, carrying a bowl in one hand and a sword in the other, had leaned forward a bit as if she was going to crumble over the city... Satellite antennas were installed on the roofs of the old redbrick houses.

Peddlers used to ride donkeys with saddle-bags along the narrow streets. Matsoni, lavashi, wine and dates were sold everywhere. Tbilisi was called Tiflis then. It was full of low-browed Georgians, Tatars with gold teeth, Armenians with their single, fused brows, red-haired Circassians, and Persians with red nails... It was worth peering at the women in colorful sundresses coming out of the sulfuric baths. The pleasant memories faded as soon as he remembered the old women from Tbilisi. Someone said that there could be no thing worse than Georgian old women, for they were witches. But nationality has nothing to do with the issue. Caucasian old women are generally of this kind – horns, and heels and tails, that's what's inherited by them. And the besoms...well, they get their besoms according to their deserts.

Gurjiev looked over Tbilisi and realized that he did not know what he was doing in the city, in the forest, by the side of the white dog now licking his knee with diligence. As a true philosopher, he finally thought that he knew nothing about his own self. Yes, wit works woe.

Sentiments rushed into the mind of Gurjiev sitting on the ground. He remembered a hot day in summer when his mother sent him to the bazaar to buy some meat. "Buy a bony piece." The woman took some money from the tucks of her dress, "A kilogram." Gurjiev had thick eyebrows, a fuzz of a moustache and a protruding chin. They had shaved his hair off the egg-shaped head because of fleas.

The "recollection" was definitely a trick played by his old-age mind. However, the "recollections" of the hike to the bazaar were so detailed that Gurjiev had no doubts that everything might have been just a slapdash fabrication of his own brains. It's hard to say whether it was a memory deception, a variety of paramnesia, or if it was red-hooded Griboedov standing under the fir tree and involuntarily inspiring him to think of these things.

One thing was obvious, Gurjiev, being besotted and feeling giddy, had no doubts when "recalling" that some time he walked through the country roads together with Filo to Shiraki

Bazaar. He was carrying a small basket with a clean cloth to wrap the meat in it. Filo led him proudly, leaving him behind and disappearing for a while. From time to time a hot wind brought a stench with it: something had been rotting. He had never gone so far without his father before. Lying in bed, the bitten and feverish man needed some meat broth.

The day before, his mom had rushed out of the house. She came back with Sirush carrying a leather pack. She had a wax face with a long nose and a hairy birthmark on the puckered face. In the black dress faded into green, she looked frightening. Gurjiev who had climbed up a pomegranate tree was observing through a window how Sirush wound a napkin around a spoon and put it into his dad's mouth... The latter squeezed the spoon with his jaws strongly. Then Sirush cut some flesh circle out of his father's leg. She sucked the blood with effort for a long time, spitting it into a bowl carried by his mother. Finally, when the bleeding lessened, she put some ointment into the wound with her forefinger and put a cloth around the wound. When leaving she tasked the family with the following: "In the medical book is written: And if one bit by a viper feels weak and feeble and is in low spirits, he must be fed with meat cooked in boiling water." His mother told Gurjiev only that evening that a snake had bitten his father.